The Government of the day rejected it. Lord Selborne, the Minister of Agriculture, told a meeting of agriculturists on 26th August, 1915, that at this new of the favourable reports of the harvests in Canada and Australia, and of the unusually good harvest secured that year in Britain, and

> " in view of the fact that it was borne in upon us as the struggle in the East of Europe developed that the call on agricultural labourers for the colours would be very heavy in the coming year ; in view of the difficulties with which the farmer would thereby be confronted ; in view of the superabundant harvest in Canada and Australia, and in view of the great financial stringency which will certainly prevail after the War, the Govern- ment decided that they would not incur the additional responsibility involved in the guarantee.'[5]

At that period the submarine menace had begun temporarily to slacken down, as the Germans were frightened at the storms of protest raised among neutral nations by their campaign. For the next few months it continued to be at a low ebb, and the alarming heights to which it would rise in the autumn of 1916 were not foreseen. But everywhere in 1916 the seasons were bad. The total cereal crops of Canada, the United States and the Argentine were lower than those for 1915 by nearly 40,000,000 tons.

The wheat yield in the United Kingdom fell off by over 400,000 tons. Add to this the sudden and ominous rise in the rate of submarine sinkings, and it will be seen that there was no ground left for complacent optimism.